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ABSTRACT

Project UNITE (Unified Intercommunity Transition and Empowerment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities) is a federally funded transition systems change grant in Virginia which attempts to integrate services among educational systems, human service agencies, communities, families, and consumers with disabilities who are involved in transition from school to work and the community. Resources are directed to the local level through regional technical assistance centers which provide information, training, coordination, and consultation. A survey of the 135 special education directors in the state (with an 87 percent response rate) examined implementation of four categories of transition service--coordinated planning, integration, support service, and administrative support. Results were compared with a similar survey conducted 3 years earlier. Findings indicated: substantial gains in planning strategies prior to school exit and in involvement of the individual with the disability or an advocate in the planning process; a lag in the provision of assistive technology behind the rate of integration of students with disabilities; increased participation of students with disabilities in work experience instruction; decreased involvement of vocational rehabilitation staff and social workers on transition teams; increased inservice for personnel and establishment of a procedure for a continuum of career/vocational services; and an increased number of school districts with formal interagency teams. The questionnaire is attached. (DB)

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Transition Revisited: Are We Moving Forward?

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Over the past ten years, transition from school to work and the community has received increased attention in special and general education. Federal mandates such as IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), funding for demonstration projects and systems change grants, a profusion of follow-up studies of special education exiters, increased parent and student involvement in transition planning and improved technology have all contributed to this focus on transition (Wehman, 1992). A recent review of research of secondary special education transition revealed a deficit of research on "best practices" in transition (Johnson & Rusch, 1993). Furthermore, there is little empirical research that identified best practices in transition and upon the impact student post secondary school outcomes (Kohler & Rusch, 1992). While this study did not examine the impact of practices, it did follow along the implementation of transition services to students with disabilities.

In 1990, Virginia established an interagency transition task force composed of individuals with disabilities, families, human service agency and education representatives to examine strategies for technical assistance and delivery of transition services across the Commonwealth. An initial statewide study was conducted to determine perceptions of district special education administration regarding the level of transition services. Demographic information was collected about transition coordination and existence of an interagency transition team. This information was used as a baseline for planning and delivery of technical assistance through Project UNITE (**UN**ified /ntercommunity **T**ransition and **E**mpowerment for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities).

Project UNITE, is a federally funded transition systems change grant for Virginia. UNITE developed an approach to transition programming across the Commonwealth that integrates services among educational systems, adult and human service agencies, communities and families and consumers with disabilities who are involved in transition from school to work and the community. Resources are directed to the local level through regional technical assistance centers which provide information, training, coordination and consultation based on regional needs The long term goal of Project UNITE is collaboration at the local level yielding self-sufficiency in coordinating and developing transition services.

As Project UNITE nears its final years, it is important to discover if we have we made strides in improving services for students with disabilities at the local level. One of the early data collection instruments used to establish a baseline was the "Transition Services Index" developed by Anderson (1992) and the staff at the Southwest Virginia Transition Center at Virginia Tech. This survey was sent to all special education administrators in Virginia to determine the degree of implementation of transition services and an analysis conducted to determine what factors facilitated delivery of services. For this study the "Transition Services Index" was adapted by the Virginia's Intercommunity Transition Council's professional development committee and disseminated to special education

directors across the Commonwealth. Responses were compared from the 1991 survey to 1994 to examine administrators' perceptions of changes over the three year time period.

Population

Special education directors in all 135 school divisions in the Commonwealth received the survey. If the special education director was not the primary person responsible for providing transition services or felt that another person in the district could answer the survey more appropriately, they were encouraged to share the survey with that person. Surveys were sent in fall 1994 with telephone follow-up calls 4 and 6 weeks after the deadline date for return. An 87% responses rate was achieved.

Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of 27 items in four categories of transition services including coordinated planning, integration, support services and administrative support. Respondents were asked to indicate level of implementation using a scale of always, usually, seldom and never. A fifth option indicated that more information was needed. Facilitators to transition services used the same rating scale and 13 items were listed for responses. The last section asked respondents to indicate the existence of a formal interagency team and who specifically served on that team and the percentage of time a coordinator spent providing transition services. A list of individuals for each school district was generated from the survey.

Data Analysis

Responses of always and usually were collapsed to indicate a positive response and seldom and never indicated a negative response for each item. Other responses were tallied by frequencies. Data were collected by each of the four regional transition specialists. Data from all regions were also totaled for comparison in this study. Frequencies and percentages were reported descriptively.

Results and Discussion

Coordinated Planning

This section included items related to planning and delivery of transition services including communication and coordination among service providers, families and individuals with disabilities. Over the three year period, substantial gains were made in two areas: a) planning strategies prior to school exit and b) involvement of individuals with disabilities or advocates in the planning process. The only item that experienced a decrease in was the provision of a written statement for cooperation among agencies. The revised survey included an item regarding a comprehensive community needs assessment, but less than a third of the districts indicated this was done. In Virginia, parents and students are seen as an integral part of the planning process and this was reflected in over 91% of the school districts.

Interagency Team

The majority of school divisions reported the existence of an interagency team. Moreover, the percentage of school districts with formal interagency teams increased by about 10% over the past 3 years. Unfortunately, little is known about the specific makeup of these committees, except frequency of participation by various outside agencies. While the primary players in these teams varies from school district to school district there appears to be three agencies that have persisted over time, including Department of Rehabilitative Services, Department of Mental Retardation and Department of Social Services. More players participated in 1991 including Department of Mental Health, Governor's Employment and Training Division and Office of Supported Employment. The Commonwealth has survived several deep budget cuts across all state agencies and these changes reflect the tumult of state government over the past 5 years.

Transition Coordinator Time

School districts in Virginia have stepped up their efforts to provide planning and delivery of transition services. In 1991, 46% of the school districts revealed they had a transition coordinator, however, the majority spent less than half of their time in coordination responsibilities and only 3% held the position full time. In contrast, by 1994, 75% of the districts had a transition coordinator and 15% were full time.

Summary

Overall, Virginia is making strides in involvement of families, communities and individuals with disabilities in systematic, coordinated transition planning. Through the federal systems change grant opportunities for staff development appear to be having an impact on provision of a continuum of career and vocational services options. This is reflected in increases in facilitators to transition such as employment, community integration and coordination among service providers. While three lead agencies, rehabilitation, social services, mental retardation work closest with school based transition teams, the levels of participation has varied over the past 3 years. Especially troubling are the significant decreases special education administrators perceive in rehabilitation and social service participation on transition teams.

Integration of Students

This section of the survey examined the level of integration of students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers across a variety of school settings. The data tend to support previous findings in which students with disabilities are integrated with their peers across all aspects of the school curriculum. Assistive technology however, is not used to the degree that students are integrated. With changes in technology, it is evident that schools are not keeping pace with the workplace.

Instructional Programs

Instructional programs focused upon specific curricula provided to students with disabilities such as functional academics, work experiences and self-advocacy skills training. While the level of instructional programming remains constant over the past three years there are some changes. Increases were noted in student participation in work experience and linkages to employment and postsecondary education. While not substantial, a small decrease in self advocacy skills and leisure skills was also apparent.

Support Services

These services include primarily counseling and assessment. As funding restrictions are placed on local districts, support services often suffer. This phenomenon is certainly true over the past three years as vocational assessment data are being used in fewer instances. The most substantial decreases of support services in vocational assessment occurred in the of assessment data for program placement and instructional and job accommodations. Additionally, a decrease in vocational educators involvement in programmatic decisions was also noted over the past three years.

Level of Support

Anderson and Asselin (in press) indicated that administrative support for transition was found to be a significant factor in providing transition services. Among the supports offered through administrators, substantial increases were noted in providing inservice for personnel and the establishment of a procedure for a continuum of career/vocational services. Provision of training and technical assistance was the primary focus of Project UNITE the past three years as well as encouraging districts to assume responsibility for transition services. In spite of legislative mandates from vocational and special education, administrators continue the same low level of cooperation between special and vocational education.

Facilitators

The availability of various services and support in the local community often facilitate delivery of transition services. School districts were asked to indicate the availability of various supports and options in their communities. Increases were noted in employment opportunities and services, housing supports and service coordination among providers. Special education administrators felt that the general commitment to transition had decreases and they lacked information about social security incentives.

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THREE YEAR FOLLOW-UP

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL TRANSITION SERVICES

1991-1994

	Percentage of Implementation	
	1991-1992 n=120	1994-1995 n=118
I. COORDINATE TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS		
1. Systematic planning strategies provide referral, educational, residential, vocational services, and employment programs before students exit school	74	94
2. A written statement of responsibilities exists among cooperating agencies involved in planning and implementing transition services	*78*	*59*
3. Community representatives and persons with disabilities serve as student advocates during the planning of transition services, providing information on available community resources.	29	53
4. Parents are involved in reviewing and evaluating their children's educational programming	96	99
5. Parents are involved in implementing their children's educational programming	82	91
6. A comprehensive local community needs assessment of school and adult services identifies current and needed services	*	27
7. There is a systematic process of communication (other than IEP) between home and school (e.g., memos, newsletters, etc.)	*	85
8. Students and/or parent(s) sign consent forms to authorize human service agencies to exchange information	*	99
II. INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES		
1. Students are integrated with non-disabled peers in academic classrooms	96	95
2. Students are integrated with non-disabled peers in vocational classes	95	96
3. Students are integrated with non-disabled peers in art, music, or physical education classes	99	99
4. Students are integrated with non-disabled peers across the general school environment (lunch, recreation, study halls, media center, etc.)	99	98
5. Technology is used to integrate students into the total school program	80	77

*Questions added 1994-95 survey; *Italics* represents >10% decrease; **Bold** represents>10% increase

III. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

	Percentage of Implementation	
	1991-1992	1994-1995
1. Instruction in independent living skills is provided	93	94
2. Instruction in social/interpersonal/self-advocacy skills is provided	92	81
3. Instruction on use of leisure time is provided	71	67
4. Students are provided opportunities to learn about and investigate career options	92	94
5. Job-seeking and job-keeping skills are part of the curriculum	90	90
6. Students participate in work-site, work-study, or job-training programs	63	75
7. Students are linked to employment or postsecondary education/training programs prior to leaving school	71	81
8. Functional academic instruction is provided	*	95

IV. SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

1. Guidance personnel assist students in career planning and decision making	84	83
2. Vocational education personnel participate in making programmatic curricular decisions	77	70
3. Vocational assessment data are used for selecting appropriate programs	*85*	*74*
4. Vocational assessment data are used in planning instructional and job accommodations	*82*	*67*
5. Job coaches/work-study coordinators provide job site supervision	*	59

V. LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION

1. Cooperative planning between vocational and special education is encouraged and supported by administrators	92	87
2. Established procedures provide a continuum of vocational education, including career education and vocational assessment	**61**	**86**
3. Inservice is provided for personnel responsible for transition services	**46**	**73**

* Question added 1994-95

VI. FACILITATORS TO TRANSITION SERVICES

	Percentage of Implementation	
	1991-1992	1994-1995
1. Employment opportunities	**49**	**86**
2. Public transportation options	80	81
3. Housing/residential support options	**31**	**74**
4. Leisure skills development options	**32**	**75**
5. Health services options (mental health*)	83	71
6. *Information about work incentives (i.e., Social Security)*	61	29
7. *General commitment to transition services*	89	42
8. Access to community support services	76	64
9. Coordination among service providers	**48**	**80**
10. Employment services	63	83
11. Information about transition services for parents	*	32
12. Self-advocacy/ support groups	*	58
13. Post-secondary education support services	*	42

VII. ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION

Participate in formal interagency team	53	67
Team Members		
1. Adult Literacy	25	9
2. Independent Living Centers	28	18
3. *Employment & Training*	58	38
4. Local Municipal Gov't	9	8
5. *Mental Retardation Services*	78	63
6. Postsecondary Education/Training	36	28
7. *Supported Employment*	48	33
8. Youth & Family Services	30	21
9. *Business & Industry*	32	13
10. Correctional Education	12	11
11. *Deaf & Hard of Hearing*	22	6
12. *Mental Health Services*	62	11
13. *Rehabilitative Services*	96	45
14. Social Services	**57**	**72**
15. Employment Commission	29	33
16. *Visually Handicapped*	46	23
17. Rights of Virginians with Disabilities	18	10
18. Parent Organizations	*	15
19. Substance Abuse Services	*	6
20. Community Recreation	*	13
21. Other	*	6

* new items in revised version

VIII. PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT BY TRANSITION COORDINATOR

	Percentage of Implementation	
	1991-1992	1994-1995
Designated Coordinator	46	75
Less than 10%	31	40
11% to 60%	10	20
61% to 87%		3
87% to 100%	3	15
No response	2	
(Total responses to question)	120	118

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